

**Provider Name: Chichester College Group**  
**TEF Student Submission**

**Approach to Evidence Gathering**

As Student President I have been asked to prepare this student submission as an additional source of information in support of the TEF submission for Chichester College Group (CCG). I hold the role of Sabbatical Student President, where I am employed on a term time only basis to champion student voice activities at all levels of CCG. A sabbatical post is rare in a Further Education organisation and is just one of the ways in which CCG recognises the importance of student voice. Through this role I attend Course Boards (student representative meetings), hold two Higher Education (HE) specific student conferences each year, hold HE focus groups and engage with the quality processes through peer lesson observations and by attending Higher Education Board meetings.

Student conferences and Course Boards are different in the ways they, the students, hear and collect student feedback. Student conferences are large group discussions not just with HE student representatives but also representatives from FE courses as all HE and FE courses have a Student Representative. We use these to get feedback on all aspects of student life at our Colleges from food to facilities and we also use these meetings to feedback on other comments or updates the students need to know about. Course Boards are HE only meetings where students can feedback on course related issues, which could include telling us about their teaching and learning, their cross-college experience and any other topics important to them.

As part of the Student Representative's role students go out to their peers on regular occasions to collect important feedback for things like Course Boards and Student Conferences. This is a vital part of their role because being able to interact with other students and help get their voices heard shows how much CCG wants to provide the best experience for its learners. Student Representatives are so important to CCG as they are the students who facilitate the voices to help develop the College.

While I represent our HE students and I am engaged in their student experience, I personally did not progress into HE after completing my College qualification. For this reason, I was allocated a member of College staff, as a mentor, to support me in my knowledge of the HE sector and the TEF submission. They supported me through reading drafts of this submission, making suggestions for enhancements and attended focus group meetings to minute the conversations held. This individual previously held my role of Student President, historically providing the student input into our previous TEF submission and having worked with the Office for Students on the pilot scheme of Subject Level TEF.

CCG also provided wider support in producing this submission, giving me access to students, staff and data as I deemed it was required. CCG also involved me in their Working Group meetings and gave me access to the Institutional TEF submission and all supporting data inclusive of TEF indicator analysis. Student opinion is important, with staff and students having a close working relationship in all aspects of College life. As a student population we hope this is reflective in the transparent manner that the submissions have been drafted and reflected in the evidence we provide throughout the student submission.

I confirm that the support provided by CCG did not unduly influence the content of this submission or our decision as a student population to provide this submission. I also confirm that I chose to provide CCG with access to both the working draft and final submission of this document.

The culture of CCG and the subcultures on each of our Colleges cannot be pinpointed to any one thing. CCG is the product of several mergers over recent years which enables the sharing of best practice to further enhance the experience of students across all sites. The Student Union is excited to see the opportunities this brings our students.

The only way to get a true sense of what it is like to be a student at one of our Colleges, is to enrol as a student and immerse yourself in that experience. But what we hope to portray in this document is a synopsis of what we have heard from our student body as we have asked them to summarise their journey.

Every student has talked passionately about how they came to study here. The first impressions at their open days were incredibly positive and students felt reassured that this was the right university setting for them. During their initial first few weeks they experienced a positive change in their learning experience compared to what they had been used to at other educational providers, including from other universities where some had transferred over to CCG. They talked about the development of new lifelong friendships, the assignments and units they have loved completing and the areas of stretch and challenge they have faced (and enjoyed!). The industry placement they undertook whilst on their HE course had also reaffirmed their thought process that they are heading into the correct industry. One student also shared that collaborating with students in another subject area within the College, he had the opportunity to discover a new passion which then led to an internal transfer onto a different HE programme. The transfer was carefully and successfully managed by staff resulting in him being on a course that he is enjoying immensely.

Through asking our student body to help me write this TEF submission, it reminds me how every student is an individual. And that is what our students love. The Group has fostered a culture and by extension a community, where individuals are treated as individuals, not a student number. This document weaves the common themes that we heard time and time again from students. Students described the culture as a family and the collaborative nature of our courses, especially on our creative courses mean they get to know each other and every member of the teaching teams.

It was important we captured as many voices as possible. The student union actively engages with students to understand their experience and collates feedback to influence College decisions and development plans. For this reason, we have a wide range of questionnaires, conference feedback and student experience feedback across multiple academic years which has formed the foundation of the evidence within this submission. This historical data is representative of all students across all Colleges and subject areas.

This has been complimented by student opinions which we have collected specifically for TEF. These opinions have been captured through a questionnaire, informal one-to-one conversations, focus groups and straw polls. Staff supported the promotion of data collection methods using lecturer shoutouts advising students to check their emails for the questionnaire and promoting the subsequent focus groups. Information on the student experience in previous academic years has been captured by reviewing the minutes of student representative meetings and student conferences.

The anonymous questionnaire was sent to all students who are currently enrolled on a TEF-eligible course. The questionnaire was sent to all students via their College email account and further promoted through student union and higher education social media channels.

The questionnaire received 46 responses from current students. Respondents come from all Colleges with a higher education provision within CCG. 23% of respondents were first year students and the questionnaire was representative of the gender demographic with a 52% female 46% male and 2% non-binary split.

Feedback was also collected through informal one-to-one conversations with current HE students who I met in our HE student common spaces and as I went about my routine student engagement activities. These conversations enabled me to collect the voice of students who were unable to attend a focus group or wanted to provide feedback via a less structured mechanism.

115 current students studying HNC, HND and degree level courses voluntarily participated in our focus groups. Through these forums we engaged with students studying the following subject areas: Acting; Cloud Computing; Costume for Performance and Film; Dance; General Engineering; Illustration; Make-up and Hair for Theatre and Media; Music Production; Musical Theatre; Photography; Prop Making and Special Effects; Textile Design; Travel and Tourism Management.

## Student Experience

In our focus groups we asked students why they chose to study at their College. Some students chose to continue studying in the familiar and inclusive College environment, having studied a level three or access course with us previously. Students joining us from other providers or returning into education based their decision on recommendations from trusted friends or through independent online research. Students whose placement is sponsored by their employer had confidence their employer chose CCG based on their long-term relationships and the experience and growth of previous apprentices that have since progressed on their internal career ladder. Once these students were on their HE course, based on their experiences they told us they would recommend their qualification to a friend because of their positive experience. They were also very confident and clear that they knew what their employment routes were once they graduate.

Students recognise the value of a HE qualification in shaping their future and make decisions to study their HE Qualifications at CCG over and above other more prestigious HE Institutions, because they place a high value on the wraparound pastoral and academic support they receive, and the outstanding learning experience provided by all their lecturers at CCG.

When students compare their experience of studying HE in a FE setting, their perceptions of a university come from comparisons drawn by speaking with friends who have progressed on to other providers. One student was studying at a local university but chose to move to the College for the second year of their course. The College environment and support available were given as reasons. The accessibility of lecturers and resources, open space and course timetable were better suited to their learning needs as a mature student returning to full time education.

All students referred to their College (noting that CCG consist of seven) as a university and this reference was frequently made during our discussions. They also talked about their HE community in College and how this was very different to that of FE. They would say that even though they know they are in a College they never feel out of place with FE students and had their own HE spaces, including Mac suites, resource centres and HE common room whilst maintaining full access to cross-college common spaces.

We asked students to summarise their student experience in one word. They told us their experience was “*brilliant*”, “*personal*”, “*enjoyable*”, “*fun*” and “*life-changing*”.

Some students have chosen their course with a specific career path in mind and have identified studying their specific qualification at this College as a route to achieving that. For other students they are studying a subject they enjoy and this is an opportunity to further explore their speciality and chosen career path. One student shared how they started on one qualification but by observing peers realised early on there was a more suited course for their needs. Working with their course team a plan was put in place to transfer programmes at the end of the HNC and opportunities were given to participate in workshop content during the first year. That student felt both course teams worked together in the best interest of the student to facilitate a smooth transition.

Students really appreciate the feeling of closeness they have with other students on their course and the ability to collaborate with students on other courses. When they are learning with each other, this expands their knowledge and employability skills. One student said, “*I have met some amazing people who will be friends for life*” because of the friendly nature of their course.

One of the benefits of studying HE in a Further Education College is the small class sizes. Students recognise this benefit and for many is the reason they chose to study here. As a rule, class sizes range between six and fifteen students which enables the lecturers to know their students as individuals. CCG prides itself on being a people organisation benefiting the people within our local communities. Students recognise this, describing the classroom experience as “nurturing” and they can see the impact this has on tailoring their learning journey.

Students talk highly about the ongoing academic support they receive. Students know who to contact within CCG if they have any issues or require accommodations for educational needs, confident their enquiry will be dealt with promptly. Students stressed how the inclusive environment of CCG has helped push them to reach out for the support they need.

One type of support on offer is assistive technologies, such as reader pens, where students with specific learning needs can loan equipment from our learning resource centre. Students with disabilities spoke about how if they ever have a need for a specific assistive technology, they are always available to them for example: a reader pen from the library, students stated they are also supported with the costs of College, knowing how to access student finance allowances and for details of support with course specific costs.

When talking to students you get a clear idea of how inclusive the College environment is. Students told us when they first came to the College for auditions, interviews or open days they got an immediate sense of welcoming and inclusivity. No matter your background the course entry requirements are designed to be inclusive for anyone who has a passion for the subject.

Students leave the classroom with the theoretical and practical knowledge required to achieve their qualification and progress into the workplace. Our lecturers have experience of working in the industries that they teach and use this to bring their teaching to life. Combined with the small classroom sizes, the lecturing teams can align their teaching style to the preferred learning style of their students.

Students notice the impact of teachers ‘Doing’ as well as ‘Teaching’. When their lecturers have that thriving attitude because they know the industry it makes it more personal and can influence that life-long learning. While some lecturers have left the industry to teach their subject full time, many still work in the industry and teach at the same time. Examples include an Illustration lecturer who is also a freelance artist, or an accountancy lecturer who provides bookkeeping services to local businesses or a business lecturer who works in the field of marketing.

Students also benefit from the research our lecturing teams conduct as part of their professional development. The findings from subject-specific research that lecturers undertake are incorporated into the classroom teaching. In one-to-one conversations students have also told us about a lecturer involvement on think tank groups and how they have found this wider application of academic research interesting.

One student said “*I would recommend the course just for the teachers*”.

The curriculum has been designed with the input of students and industry. In our questionnaire students commented on the design of the curriculum and how the structure of lessons and assignment deadlines contributes to the creation of a stress-free learning environment. Having said this, students also commented on the stretch and challenge of the lesson content and activities. Students feel the curriculum is preparing them for their next steps. Past students have told us how their qualification has enabled them to progress in their chosen field. Furthermore, students value the balance between theory and practical work.

Since the merger of former GBMC and CCG, student voice has been a main point of focus. Work is being undertaken to review the role of HE student representatives and develop Student Union

common rooms to enhance that student experience and the ways in which our students can feedback to the wider College.

In the NSS student voice scored 69.2% for full time students. This score can be partially attributed to the terminology used within the questionnaire. Our students recognise student voice by the names of our student unions: Brinsbury SU, Chi SU, Crawley SU, Northbrook SU and Brighton Metropolitan SU. Unlike in many higher education providers, internally the term “student union” refers to student voice activities, with our enrichment programme branded as “Xtra”. When the question “are you aware of the student union, the activities and support they can provide” was asked in the Group’s first impression survey the score was 92% which we feel is more representative of the opinion of our students.

Equally, a similar argument in question terminology can be made for assessment and feedback where the Group scored 73.3% in the NSS survey. Through our focus groups we asked students what the terms assessment and feedback mean to them. We discovered the majority of students associate these terms with the formal process of submitting an assignment and getting feedback on their final submission. Students receive feedback in many ways, including one-to-one conversations with lecturing teams, asking questions over Teams, Google Chat and email and by sharing first drafts of assignments to understand to what degree they are meeting the grading criteria.

When looking at feedback from the focus groups you can see a lot of similarities from students on completely different types of courses. When asked “how does feedback and assessment support your progression?” many students said that it helps them identify their own strengths and weaknesses and helps link these to what they need to work on for the best grades and life after they complete their course. The immediate reaction from students was it is important because when they received this feedback, they would receive extra and tailored support based on what is being seen by their lecturers. They also said it’s about that 1-1 in person feedback.

One student said, “Feedback to me is essential”. Students clearly understand feedback and how to approach feedback to develop and progress as a student. They use their feedback to improve the quality and content of future assignments, obtaining higher grades on their units and to improve their own independent studies.

CCG offers a wider range of traditional and subject specific learning resources. During focus groups students verified the resources are up to date and suitable for their research. Classroom specific resources such as practice spaces and practical resources are accessible outside classroom hours.

There is a wide range of different learning resources available to our students from the extensive number of fiction and non-fiction books housed in our onsite libraries to the ebooks, subject specific databases and online programs. Our students feel they have access to everything they need to support their learning. Students are given access to the latest industry standard equipment to complete their course work. For example, our music students have access soundproof recording booths and studios kitted with a range of instruments, high-end microphones and a combination of analogue and digital mixing equipment.

One Acting students said because of the College they could expand on their knowledge and use resources they never had access to before they were quoted saying

“Drama Online is a God send for me”

When speaking to students over the length of my presidency and especially in the past weeks while compiling this TEF submission, I have heard amazing feedback about the student experience and every voice is different.

**Figure 1 – Word cloud of what student voice means to HE CCG students**



## Student Outcomes

Students want the best outcome for themselves when dedicating their time to a HE course. Each student will have a different opinion on the purpose of studying HE which will influence their personal learning goals. Students are able to clearly communicate these goals and demonstrate how they apply to their individual learning journeys. Students told us they can see how their qualification is developing them not only academically but also by helping to develop their personal skills. Students fed back that they are more confident in their soft skills such as: people skills, time management, problem solving and groupwork.

Academic development is also important to our students as they prepare to progress into employment in their chosen industry. We asked our students to summarise their personal and academic development whilst on their course. They told us that they have increased confidence compared with when they started their course. Students also recognised their research and academic writing skills had developed which can be applied to future coursework to achieve the best grades possible. Some will also use this skillset as they progress into postgraduate academic study. By studying a university course our students are constantly testing and improving their writing skills for essays and course work. They feel they are developing the mindset of an industry professional and gaining critical thinking skills, all of which will support them when progressing onto employment.

In a straw poll we asked 70 first year students several questions related to educational gains development. Overall, a staggering 80% said they believed their resilience was building and 87% agreeing their confidence is growing, whilst a further 93% they are building their knowledge about

their industry. These students have only been at the College a few months and they are already developing personal and transferable skills alongside their academic knowledge.

Students understand time management is a massive part of university learning and personal development. Our timetables have been designed with student input to ensure it provides learners with flexibility to attend all classes which still having sufficient time to complete independent learning and assignments, maintain employment obligations and spend time with family. This is particularly valued by our mature students. They also have access to on-site facilities including the library, learning resource centre, studios, workshops and specialist software outside of class time. Many students reported that the resources are amazing, for example one student told us

*'I never have to worry about accessing materials and resources because I know the College will always have what I need'.*

By observing our students, you can see how well they work with each other and interact as a team to complete their work. An example includes when I recently observed musical theatre students do a groupwork session on harmonies, rehearsing for their latest show *Carrie* (the musical). All the students listened to what was needed of them and got straight to work. It was clear when speaking to students that they were building their teamwork skills but also their leadership skills. The students also must do presentations for their classes on their latest work and this gives them opportunities to showcase their own work and be able to give and take critiques from their peers. This peer-to-peer learning is highly appreciated. Students reported that not only did they want to do well for their lecturers, whom they have enormous respect, but also, they wanted to well in front of their peers and for their peers. The term they used was the 'ricochet effect' – in that by wanting to do well for one another their own standards improved. They also saw this as a stretch and challenge opportunity.

Some project work involves collaboration with students studying other HE courses. Examples include our photography students working with our fashion students or our hair and make-up students working with performing arts. This collaboration not only builds teamwork and leadership skills, but our students spoke about how they value these collaborations and the richness it adds to their projects. Having access to other students studying different subjects enables them to widen their approaches to their project briefs. Students are given the opportunity to work with many different teams and people and as a result the students already recognise that they may not always agree but they work to overcome any differences and collaborate to complete the project. This is an important skill development and students recognise this as an important part of their learning experience.

Students feel studying with CCG prepares them for their next step; whether that be future study or employment and all courses have an industry placement or equivalent experience built into the curriculum. For some of our students, the industry links held by CCG were a factor in choosing where to study.

Students commented on how industry placements helped inform their decision of what area of their subject they wanted to specialise in based on the greater insight this gave through being immersed in the day to day running of a business operating in the sector. For example, a student reflected that

*"While on my work placement, I explored so many branches of the industry I want to work in, it made me want to try everything whilst I was there."*

Examples of industry placement opportunities our students have previously undertaken include musical theatre students dressing as elves and developing character skills working in Santa's grotto at a local fayre; directing and choreographing a performance of *Matilda*, which was subsequently delivered to local school children; and engaging with national television and audio

companies for example the BBC in which student work has been broadcasted. Our music students release their original songs and soundtracks onto Spotify and have had pieces played on national BBC radio stations.

Students build their skills and knowledge as they progress through their course. For example, student shared their experience of spending the first year of their course developing their skills while producing personal projects. In their second year the course teams match students with local theatre production and film companies to work on live projects. In their final year, students go out as freelancers, sourcing their own clients for which they are expected to use the live brief as part of their project work. A similar story is said for our costume students, one student said that through the help of the course and the lecturers she has secured a place with a London costume and prop company who work within the film industry.

Students work is proudly displayed throughout the College. When students produce online portfolios and their work is displayed during open days, this brings a sense of pride in their work. During a focus group with prop students, they stated this was one of the reasons they joined the College. They were so amazed at the quality of the work they saw being done by other students, they knew this is what they wanted to do and learn those skills.

When having an informal chat with a current HE student they recounted their experience of going to Seville, Spain for their industry placement in their first year. It gave her a greater appreciation of the different opportunities there were to apply her qualification across different industries, in a global marketplace. That insight gave her that boost in knowing she chose the right course for her. During the industry placement she was able to apply the knowledge she gained in the classroom, build her first-hand experiences into her next assignment and contextualise the industry experiences of her lecturing team.

In addition to local industry links, students have opportunities to work collaboratively across CCG. One hair and make-up student, later this year will be working with third year production students to style the actors in their project for their final degree assessment.

Progression is completed through careers advice. The careers service within CCG, known as progression plus, supports students in identifying their next steps. They are also well placed to offer support in forming CVs and developing interview skills. They are also able to run mock competency-based interviews. In past Student / Staff Liaison Committees (SSLC - now known as Course Boards) we ask students about learning resources and services which are available to them, all students knew about Progression + especially students who had come from FE courses.

Our Xtra Enrichment Programme offers several overseas trips accessible to all students. Some of these trips have strong links to classroom content for HE students. Our turtle conservation trip to Greece, and previously Costa Rica, is popular with HE Animal Management students. This provides first hand interaction on a conservation project and the opportunity to develop links on project to undertake further projects in the future.

Not all students know what they want to do when they start a course and for many, university is an opportunity to find themselves. CCG is committed to ensuring students are on the right course to meet their own outcomes. On the rare occasion that students decide they want to take a different path, staff are supportive of this decision. Students are helped to understand the bigger picture so they can make an informed decision about their future. Students value these open conversations and the support they are offered in moving forward.

### **The Impact of Covid and Lockdowns**

While lockdown presented some challenges, students told us they felt they were able to continue their studies remotely. During the Covid-19 lockdowns all courses moved to online learning and



when restrictions eased, hybrid learning models were adopted. Classes were delivered over Microsoft Teams and Google Classroom, complemented by using our VLE – CCG-Online. Pastoral support was also maintained. Our Higher Education Coaches regularly checked in with students on a one-to-one basis. Digital learning is embedded throughout the curriculum however, this move to fully online teaching was a change in working environment for both students and staff had to adjust to a new way of teaching.

Students studying practical subjects, for example those requiring access to workshop environments and studying Performing Arts felt the greatest impact by not being on site. However, in our questionnaire learners commented on the professionalism of our lecturing teams and their ability to adapt to online lesson delivery while this remained interactive and engaging. In particular, our students valued the investment CCG had made into online learning resources which mitigated barriers in being able to access the onsite libraries and learning resource centres. This was reinforced during our focus group with Musical Theatre where lecturers found creative ways to utilise technology to enhance remote group singing lessons.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion the student union is proud to endorse CCG in the TEF submission process. As a student body we are confident we have chosen the right provider and course to prepare us for our next steps of higher-level study and employment. Through this document you have heard how we have a culture which is changing lives through learning, and we hope in partnership with the institutional TEF submission you are able to get a true appreciation of the real-world outcome this work has. At the beginning of this submission, I stated the only way to get a true sense of what it is like to be a student at one of our Colleges is to enrol as a student and immerse yourself in that experience. It is in that spirit I would like to conclude this submission and echo the voices of all our students in recommending CCG as a HE provider to our friends, family and the wider readership of this document.